



## 150 Years and Our Story is Still Unfolding

### Did you know that VPC is 150 years old this year?!

Established in 1871, 2021 is a big birthday year in the life of our church! Following are highlights of a few interesting facts about Vienna Presbyterian Church over its long history. A special worship service was held on August 22, 2021, to recognize this momentous occasion. What is your favorite memory of VPC?

*Beginnings of Vienna Presbyterian Church: Early in 1871 the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA, (the “northern” church), in cooperation with Washington City Presbytery, sent a Reverend Mr. Hamner to work toward establishing a church in the area. The nearest Presbyterian Church was located at Lewinsville, and the need for religious services closer to Vienna became apparent. Through Mr. Hamner’s efforts a church was organized by the Presbytery in the summer of 1871, six years after the Civil War, and a Sunday School was established. There were seven charter members, including two elders. Shortly afterwards, two more members were received. These became known as “the original nine.” Of note is that seven of these original nine were women; the only two men were the elders.*

### Did you know that VPC’s long history of new church development began as early as the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

In the fifteen years since VPC was organized by the “original nine” in 1871, the church built a Chapel in 1874 and had more than quadrupled in size (38 members and a Sunday School enrollment of 60 – and a Home Missions offering of \$16.16 – reported to the Presbytery in 1886)! As a thriving village church, the Ladies Aid was born as well as the Christian Endeavor Society and a vibrant “Sabbath School” with officers of the Sunday School elected annually by the teachers and members of adult Bible classes. Classes were held in the sanctuary divided by green curtains hung by wires when weather didn’t permit to be outside; the Session could be found meeting under the trees at the rear of the church during Sunday School hour. Sunday School was also a channel for outreach to other communities, and around 1911, VPC started a mission Sunday School in the Idylwood School, the forerunner of Idylwood Presbyterian Church! (Of special note given that the Idylwood community is one of the areas we currently are serving through Bags of Love.)

Too small to have a full-time pastor, VPC held shared pastorates with Lewinsville Presbyterian Church from 1871-1914, followed by several years of a shared pastorate with Idylwood Presbyterian, reaching a membership high of 115 in 1932. The Great Depression years were a struggle with the pulpit often filled by stated supply, student candidates, and for a period, by the Vienna Methodist Church pastor as worship was held jointly in the VPC Chapel. The faithful persevered, and in 1940, Rev. Horace Churchman Lukens arrived to a congregation of 91 members (19 of whom were inactive) in a small town of 1200 people.

During his tenure in the 1950's, Fairfax Presbyterian Church was established as a direct outgrowth of VPC's efforts with 24 members dismissed to serve as charter members of FPC; as well, VPC took an active interest during this decade in the development of Knox Presbyterian Church in Falls Church. By the time of Rev. Lukens' departure in 1976, a little more than a century after VPC was established, our congregation numbered 1321 members and Vienna had grown to a population of 18,000.

This form of outreach was revived in the mid-eighties when it was decided, due to lack of building space and other then-existing limitations, not to increase the size of the sanctuary but to only add Christian Education and office space. It was recognized that lack of worship space could limit future growth, so a decision was made as an alternative to help establish other churches in the Northern Virginia area. Then co-pastor Peter James took a special leadership role in the planning with other VPC members to start a new Presbyterian Church in Centreville. Upon the establishment of Centreville Presbyterian Church, chartered in 1992, VPC turned its attention to additional church development with the establishment of Riverside Presbyterian Church in the 1990's and Brambleton Presbyterian Church early in the new millennium.

### **Did you know that VPC's mission of "becoming like Christ together for the world" has deep roots going as far back as the early days of the church with its strong emphasis on evangelistic outreach over many years?**

As stated in VPC's vision, Jesus commissions His church to go and make disciples, and VPC has been on this path ever since its beginning. The early church existed primarily as a worshipping congregation, but other forms of collective spirituality were also important, including mid-week and Sunday evening Prayer meetings. The sacrament of communion especially played a central part in the spirituality of the day with a special preparatory service before communion, usually on Saturday. (On one occasion in 1890, an entire week of daily Prayer Meetings were conducted in preparation for the Sacrament.)

Sunday School also played a vital role in equipping members for the disciple-making vision and was more than an expression of the congregation's desire to educate its children in the faith but was also an outreach to the community. From the Session minutes for March 16, 1899: *It was unanimously agreed to devote the session of the Sabbath School on the 26th instruction to special effort with the scholars, to the end that a decided stand for Christ may be taken by the unconverted scholars, such day to be termed "Decision Day."* Evangelical services for the church itself were also held from time to time in the period as another form of reaching the unchurched.

In the 1940's, Pastor Lukens brought his experience in the Oxford Group movement to bear on VPC to reach out to the community and the world in Christ's love. His experience of the Holy Spirit deeply impressed and excited him as to the possibilities of a God-directed life in world evangelization, and he became convinced of the potential strength for Christian evangelism of a team of people united to Christ and one another. A nine-point presentation on evangelism in 1942 resulted in more engagement of the congregation and a growth in church membership.

Early in 1951, in the conviction that Vienna Protestant churches should “unite in the promotion of a spiritual relationship that will develop greater cooperation and enthusiasm for the cause of Christ’s kingdom,” VPC invited other churches to join in an “intensive evangelistic program.” This resulted in six Sunday evening services, evangelistic in character, through the season of Lent, beginning with an Ash Wednesday service at Oakton Methodist Church.

1976 and 77 found VPC participating as one of 300 churches in the “Here’s Life, Washington” evangelistic program to contact every home by telephone in the Washington area with the message of new life in Christ. A Lay Renewal Weekend was conducted in March 1977 to motivate each member to reexamine his or her commitment to Jesus Christ.

Today, Great Banquet, Growing Your Soul, and Adult Learning Communities, among many other activities, support and encourage members of our community to examine their commitment to Christ and collectively explore how to live out our VPC mission and vision.

### **Did you know that the decision to prioritize giving for missions was an important part of VPC’s ministry going back as far as 1948?**

In 1947, the church had joined a denominationally sponsored “New Life Movement,” aimed at spiritual renewal and church growth with a goal of fifty new members each year in 1948 and 1949. Unwilling to neglect spiritual outreach through missions in a quest for numbers, VPC voted to double its benevolence budget, from \$580 to \$1,160 for 1948. Of course, the church had a strong tradition of giving for both local and foreign missions going back to its earliest days, and very much in line with our current mission of “becoming like Christ together *for the World*” as we participate in Christ’s ongoing ministry of transformation in the world by sharing the good news in word *and deed*.” VPC has a strong history of living the word in deed while addressing social justice issues and other real needs in the world.

The Session’s 1890 annual report to Presbytery showed contributions to denominational boards for Home Missions and Foreign Missions, with special line items for each “by the Ladies,” along with an offering for the “Freedmen” cause supported directly by the congregation. Following the Great 1906 San Francisco earthquake, a special collection was taken for the work of the church in that city. The Ladies Aid Society played an important role in raising funds for benevolent causes, and in 1914, the Women’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society was established (later known as the Ladies Missionary Society). In 1917, they increased their foreign mission subscription, citing the fact that missionaries had great needs because of the war. By the 1920’s, benevolence (or missions) offerings far exceeded the amount budgeted. The depression brought challenges for giving, yet the faithful continued, and a special canvas for the benevolence fund was made in 1934. In 1935, the Ladies Aid Society and Missionary Society merged into the Women’s Auxiliary.

Through all the hard times, VPC remained a serving church and always maintained its benevolence giving. Emerging from the depression, VPC moved forward grounded in its strong spiritual commitment and outreach in mission, indeed “built by faith” and “called to serve.” The commitment of the congregation in the wartime years brought substantial growth in mission outreach. As the financial condition of the church improved, benevolence contributions increased

even more rapidly than the congregation's own budget. There was continuing support for long-time interests such as the Presbyterian Home and the American Bible Society as well as repeated support for the wartime Presbyterian World Emergency Fund, and the congregation expressed concern for postwar Europe through participation in the denominations postwar Restoration Fund. In 1948, nearly 500 pounds of clothing in good condition, as well as other items such as food, candles and Christian literature were collected for European relief and transmitted via Church World Service. VPC's interest in overseas mission was indicated by the formation of the Missionary Committee in 1948. Local social justice outreach was also important, finding VPC active in organizing the Fairfax County Mental Hygiene Clinic in the late 40's, and VPC women instrumental in getting a school lunch program started in the 50's by providing lunches (made in the women's homes since there was no church kitchen at the time) for poor children at Vienna Elementary School until "due time" when the School Board took over.

This era also found regular mission emphasis activities at home, including regular mission speakers and preachers and a Missions Week children's program in conjunction with visiting missionaries and covered dish suppers. In the 1950's, a VPC Committee on Missionary Education was formed with representatives from the Women's Auxiliary, Session, Trustees, Sunday School and other groups, and a "School of Mission" was conducted. Also, in the 50's, the congregation began holding a series of four or five Sunday night Mission Family Nights, complete with representative decorations, on several consecutive Sundays to study specific areas of mission and hear missionaries speak; this tradition continued through the 60's and 70's.

Certainly, this strong foundation found VPC ripe for the establishment of the Summer Mission Projects (SMPs) which were started in the 1980's and continue to this day. The first SMP was made up of a group of seven adults and twelve young people with a trip to Dunbar, Pennsylvania, where the group did home repairs and cleared an overgrown cemetery. Important to this trip was a focus on the spiritual aspects of the trip and Christian care among the members of the group, a theme which continues to this day. Many members of the VPC community were also led to mission service as a result of the strong mission's emphasis of the church.

Over the years, specific mission activities of VPC have varied with the times, current events and the need, yet our community continues to joyfully serve and share the good news through word and deed as evidenced by the range of [mission and outreach](#) activities we support today!

### **Did you know that the Community Coalition for Haiti was founded through a partnership between VPC and the First Baptist Church of Vienna?**

Vienna Presbyterian has a strong history of partnering with fellow members of the body of Christ in our local community in line with our contemporary mission of "Becoming like Christ Together for the World." VPC's outreach has crossed racial as well as denominational lines. In 1992, World Vision contacted churches about a project of matching churches of different races for partnership in ministry, a proposal that was received by Senior Pastor Pete James with enthusiasm. A match was established with First Baptist Church of Vienna, a church with an even longer history than VPC's, having been established in 1867, four years prior to VPC's charter, to serve the town's settlement of free Blacks. The two vibrant churches initially joined in home

repair projects in the Vienna area. Additionally, a joint Good Friday worship service was held, with a joint Holy Week service an ongoing tradition today. Joint Men's group, Women's group and SWATT (Seniors with Available Time & Talents) events were also held. The two churches formed the Vienna Church Coalition for Housing (VCCH), an organization which provided housing repair and property maintenance for the elderly and needy, with the biggest project being the building of a Habitat for Humanity house off Route 1 in Alexandria. Together, members raised \$72,000 and spent fourteen weekends building, meeting for tailgate coffee and prayer in the First Baptist parking lot before leaving for the worksite. By the mid-nineties, some of the doctor members of the group who had traveled to Haiti suggested they turn their attention there with a major joint project in Pignon, Haiti, in 1999. A joint congregational breakfast was held to report out and seek ongoing support from the churches, and the Community Coalition for Haiti (CCH), an ongoing ministry, was born.

Local and world missions have been a part of the fabric of our church since the earliest days, and efforts have multiplied since Pastor Pete's arrival in 1979 through partnering with others in the name of Christ. In the late 70's when a teacher of a Special Education Sunday School class at Wesley United Methodist Church was moving and unable to find a replacement, she called VPC to ask the church to take on the class of five children, a challenge enthusiastically received. This group eventually became our beloved Friendship Class. The ministry was greatly enlarged when VPC partnered with Church of the Apostles and Truro Episcopal, to establish a residential program for people with developmental disabilities, initially Wellspring Ministries which later merged with Langley Residential Homes in the early 2000's. The VPC English as a Second Language program (now known as ESOL) was started in 1994 with the help of Yousaf Saroia, a Pakistani Presbyterian minister. Thousands of people have been served through ESOL over the years since, including several years when there have been over 500 students from 52 countries represented! VPC has also been an active partner over the years with other concerned churches and individuals in the area with the Committee for Helping Others (CHO), established in 1969 to provide simple, loving charity to those in need of goods and services.

VPC has truly been built by faith and called to serve as the outreach of its members has been greatly multiplied through partnering with the larger body of Christ throughout our community. More recently established examples of partnerships include participation in the Hypothermia Prevention Program, Reset 180 (formerly NOVA-HTI), and Bags of Love. Learn more about these and other mission and outreach activities [here](#) and consider how you may [serve](#)!

**Above compilations taken from:**

- Built By Faith, Called to Serve Vienna Presbyterian Church 1871 – 1999 history
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/local/wp/2014/02/21/viennas-community-coalition-for-haiti-builds-clinic-business-hope-for-haitians/>
- <https://www.cchaiti.org/who-we-are/our-history/>.

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